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1853

FAIR PLAY FOR BROTHER IGNATIUS.

A LETTER

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND
THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD STUART,

PERPETUAL CURATE OF S. MARY MAGDALENE'S CHURCH,
MUNSTER SQUARE, REGENT'S PARK.

"Surtout point du zèle."

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A LETTER, &c.

My Lord,

You told me last September, that you wished to be consulted before Brother Ignatius was asked to preach again at S. Mary Magdalene's Church. In consequence of this Brother Ignatius wrote to you, asking your leave to preach here, but failed to obtain it. Within the last few weeks I have written to you myself, asking on what conditions you would allow him to preach at this church; but I have been unable to obtain any farther reply than that you "do not think it desirable, under existing circumstances," that he should officiate here. What the circumstances are to which you refer, you are not willing to tell me, which I regret, as it hinders the possibility of rectifying them. You say, however, that it is not your intention that he "shall officiate in *any* church of your diocese" without obtaining your leave, from which I conclude that the circumstances relate rather to him than to myself.

I am sorry that you should have forbidden his preaching here, and still more sorry that you do not give any clue as to the terms on which you would

allow him to do so. He is a clergyman of the Church of England, in deacon's orders, and, notwithstanding his unusual mode of life and dress, he might, I think, reasonably hope for so much toleration as this—viz., that he should be allowed to speak for himself wherever he could find a clergyman who would invite him to do so. Had you named any terms on which you would allow him to preach, he would have been brought to book at once; for he professes a sincere desire to submit to all lawful authority in the Church of England:—as it is, I fear he will only be looked on as “a martyr”—i.e., as one who has been condemned unheard and untried.

There is nothing, I suppose, in his wish to restore the monastic life in the Church of England, which is in itself wrong, even though we may doubt the success of such an attempt, at least in its present form. No one can deny that our LORD does encourage a life of self-denial and voluntary poverty in those who feel called to it; for He says, “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life;” and the occasion on which this was said shows that it applies to *voluntary* self-denial, and not to the endurance of unavoidable trials only. Moreover, this spirit of self-denial and voluntary poverty has proved in all ages a far more powerful agent in winning men's hearts to God, than lay committees and guinea subscriptions have ever done. It is only for those who have a vocation for such a life that it is recommended; but surely to discourage it in those who do desire it, would be

quite as alien to the spirit of Christianity as to require it of those who do not. Now Brother Ignatius, whatever faults he may have, is very consistent in his desire for this life; he has adopted the Benedictine rule, by which many of the best and ablest men in the Church of CHRIST have lived; and he has done so, I believe, for these two reasons—viz., first, because he preferred to adopt some tried and established rule; and, secondly, because he found the Benedictine rule harmonized with the principles of the Church of England. And not only has he set on foot a monastery at Norwich, finding associates ready to keep this rule with him, but he has met with a very considerable amount of sympathy throughout England, which seems to show that the principles he advocates are by no means confined to himself and his immediate friends. Whether his work will prosper in its present form, or in some modified form, or whether it will serve simply to break up the ground for more permanent associations, I cannot venture to guess; but I do think it would be most unkind and unchristian not to allow him fair play at least for his experiment in the Church of England. It is easy enough to sneer at such attempts, but the experience of centuries has proved that sneering cannot put down faith and zeal, while a little liberality and trustfulness towards them may help to bring such efforts to a good and useful end.

Of the “great plainness of speech” which Brother Ignatius unquestionably uses in preaching, I will only say that it seems to commend itself to many people, and that he has no desire, I believe, to obtrude it on those who dislike it. The common fault of Church of England preaching is certainly in the

opposite direction—viz., that of coldness and reserve. Indeed, it is not unusual now-a-days, to hear men regret this great reserve and coldness, and profess considerable sympathy with the Methodist preachers of the last century, whose sermons were more energetic and telling with the people. You yourself, my Lord, in your primary charge, expressed an opinion something of that kind; for you said, “I could not but remember how, when a curate at a small village in Oxfordshire, I had marvelled at the excitement raised in a quiet and dull place by the gathering of the Methodists in a fine summer’s day, on the common, under the shadow of the old trees; —how the voice of the preacher, sounding through the stillness of a listening crowd, and the burst of their hymns pealing far and wide through the village, had seemed well suited to attract and rouse the hearts of many, who never entered within the church to join in its measured devotion and listen to its calm teaching.” These words, my Lord, need but very little change to make them applicable to the monks’ services at Norwich—e.g., “I cannot but remember how, when on a visit lately to the monastery at Norwich, I marvelled at the excitement raised in a quiet and dull place by the crowds flocking to the monks’ services in the low-roofed room that serves them for a chapel; how they listened with rapt attention to the voice of their preacher, and how the burst of their hymns and litanies sung with heart and voice pealed far and wide down the neighbouring streets, and seemed well suited to attract and rouse the hearts of many who are quite unmoved by the cold and lifeless way in which the Church service is too often conducted.” If then you can sympathize with the Wesleyan preacher, can you not

extend some measure of sympathy to the zeal and self-devotion of these monks also ?

And what a proof does that small unpretending chapel at the monastery give of the wisdom of using all lawful appeals to the eye and ear in religious worship, and enlisting the heart as well as the head in the services of the Church ! Brother Ignatius has a good voice and ear, and conducts his services with life and spirit, and at the same time with reverence and devotion ; and he has certainly shown very good taste in the decorations of his chapel. It is but a long, low-roofed room, made by knocking down a partition and supporting the ceiling with iron pillars, and yet a little furniture and decoration has given it a far more home-like and religious character than many a grand Gothic church possesses, all pinnacles and tracery outside, but within as cold and lifeless as a chalk pit. An altar at one end, raised on a few steps, with a crucifix and several candles, and vases of flowers, forms, of course, the chief feature of the room ; an old chancel screen placed a little way in front of this separates the monks from the congregation ; a small pulpit stands on one side with a crucifix hanging by it on the wall ; a picture, in a handsome frame, hangs a little farther down ; and two shallow recesses (mere bricked-up windows) are very simply and tastefully utilized by being converted into shrines ; in the one stands a figure of the Virgin and Child,—in the other a figure of S. Benedict,—and on a shelf at the foot of each are arranged a few vases of flowers and some candlesticks ; the iron pillars, covered with red baize, and wreathed (when I was there) with evergreens, form almost the only other attempt at decoration ; there is in the choir a small and well-toned organ, by Gray and Davison.

In this chapel then, unpretending as it is, you may see crowds of people day by day attending service, and even staying on sometimes from one service to another, and joining most heartily in the offices of prayer and praise. And why is this? but because Brother Ignatius has not hesitated to use, in addition to very energetic preaching, all those lawful aids to eye and ear, "queis humana sibi doleat natura negatis," I think we may say, in most of our churches; lights, incense, vestments, flowers, music, evergreens, pictures, statues, all are pressed into the service of God; in short, Brother Ignatius has had the good sense to *furnish* his chapel, as well as to open it, and the result speaks for itself. What miserable folly it is, in face of the alienated masses of our town population, to go on repudiating the use of these things which speak of God and of the worship of heaven through the eye and ear to the heart! When men invite their friends to their own houses, they do not welcome them to sanded floors and whitewashed walls, with a loaf of bread and a jug of water on the sideboard in case any one should be *really* hungry or thirsty! and why then should we not furnish our churches as well as our own houses, and give outward and visible expression to the language of David, "LORD, I have *loved* the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth?"

Of the dress that Brother Ignatius has adopted I will not say much: he is better able to defend it himself than I am. I fear it will be a hindrance (he thinks the reverse,) to his getting many persons to join him; and fearing this I did my best, a year ago, in Mr. Drury's study at Claydon, to dissuade him from adopting it; but he says he desires to be *a monk* and nothing else, and to be known as such by

his dress, and that he is not ashamed of that uniform which so many of God's saints have worn, and in which so many Christian victories have been won,—including even the conversion of England twelve centuries since. People may get accustomed to it in course of time ; they have already done so, I believe, to some extent ; but, be this as it may, I cannot conceive that the monastic dress alone, even with the tonsured head and sandalled feet, is a sufficient reason for sending Brother Ignatius to Coventry. If he pays his own tailor's bill (and it can't be a very long one), let him wear what dress he pleases.

You might ask, perhaps, my Lord, why I, more than other clergymen, should address you on this subject. My own sympathy with the general principles and ideas on which Brother Ignatius acts might be my sufficient excuse for doing this, leading, as it has done, to my asking him to preach at S. Mary Magdalene's church, and to your forbidding him to do so. But I have other reasons as well. Brother Ignatius used occasionally to attend S. Mary Magdalene's church ten or twelve years ago, as a boy ; and it was then that I first became acquainted with him ; and it is in consequence of this previous acquaintance that I have wished to show him any kindness I could, by asking him to preach here, while other clergymen were, not unnaturally, rather shy of him. It was not, however, by any advice of mine that he entered on the monastic life. In the autumn of last year, when I heard of the mob violence he was exposed to at Claydon, I took advantage of a kind invitation from Mr. Drury, and went to judge for myself how matters stood there. After having ascertained, by hearing Brother Ignatius preach in a schoolroom, that there was a good deal

more than mere costume in the matter, I invited him to come and tell his own story for himself and plead his own cause at S. Mary Magdalene : which he did for the first time in Advent, 1863. I asked him to preach here again in the following June ; and this time I advertized it in the Church newspapers, in order that his friends in London might come and hear him, if they wished to do so. The church was crowded to excess, both morning and evening, and the interest felt in his work was shown by the eagerness with which those who were standing in the crowd at the lower end of the church stretched out their arms to put their subscriptions into the offertory bag for him. I asked him to preach a third time in September ; but the third time is commonly said to be fatal, and so it certainly proved in this case ; and as some of the newspapers were kind enough to accuse me of disappointed greed and malignant passion on the occasion, I may as well state the circumstances of it. I had asked Brother Ignatius to preach here, on September 11, for a foreign mission, with which a friend of his own was closely connected, and I had offered the collections in church to that mission. But his friend declined his advocacy of the cause, and as I was unwilling to withdraw the invitation I had given him, the mission service was put off. It thus became necessary to state very distinctly what the collections in church on that day were to be for, lest any one still supposing them to be for the mission, should put in their subscription for that purpose, which would have caused, of course, a very disagreeable confusion. I advertized therefore (as Brother Ignatius himself had recently had an abundant collection here) that the collections on that day would be for the ordinary purposes of our

offertory, on which there was then, and still is a small debt. My annoyance was simply that Brother Ignatius chose to throw me overboard at the last moment, to please another person, when I thought I had earned a right to more consideration at his hands (for he had been very kindly treated at this church), and had therefore relied on his word, given in the full knowledge of all circumstances. The sore throat would not have hindered his preaching here had it not been for other reasons ;—that was, *and is* my opinion. If Brother Ignatius called on me, as he has a perfect right to do, to retract this opinion or to give my reasons for it, I should, of course, feel bound to give them ; but what I said then I would say again, of him or of any one else, if occasion called for it.

All this, however, is now a thing of the past, and I should not have thought it worth speaking of again but for the absurd prominence given to it by the newspapers. His work is a thing of the present, and I hope it may be of the future also ; and it is this which I have still wished to help by asking him to preach here again, from time to time, until other clergymen should get a little more familiarized to him, and invite him to preach at other churches as well. I believe there are many clergymen who would gladly aid him, did they know more of him, for he is a most gentlemanly, pleasant, good-tempered person, and devoted heart and soul to his work ; nor is he, in any sense, under-educated, as some newspapers have said of him ; he was prepared for Ordination at Trinity College, Glenalmond, and out of many letters I have received from him, I do not remember one in which there was any mis-spelling (which was, I believe, the special accusation

against him), though it is likely enough, of course, that he has occasionally mis-spelt words, as other and older people also do sometimes. It would be very easy for any clergyman, who invited him to preach at his church, to tell his congregation beforehand that they must expect to see and perhaps hear something a little unusual, and that he does not at all pledge himself to sympathize with all the details of Brother Ignatius' work; but that it seems to him nevertheless more liberal, and more trustful to give Brother Ignatius the opportunity of speaking for himself in the Church of England, rather than to turn the cold shoulder upon him because his ideas do not run exactly in the common groove.

And is there no Bishop in the Church who will venture to say a kind word and extend a kind hand to Brother Ignatius? Is it so great a sin to dedicate every faculty of mind and body to the service of God, if not done quite in the usual way, that a young clergyman must be utterly tabooed and cast aside for doing so? Surely it is a great pity that the Bishop of Norwich did not license him to the curacy of Claydon, when Mr. Drury offered it to him, and two hundred or more parishioners begged that he might be appointed! he would then have been under the immediate guidance of a friend, whose kindness and generosity towards him had been abundantly proved, and who would have checked, as I know Mr. Drury did check, such tendencies as he thought foolish and unreasonable. The Bishop of Norwich, as Brother Ignatius tells me, assigned no reason whatever for refusing to license him; and in this he was like yourself, my Lord, for you hold out no hope to Brother Ignatius that you would allow him to preach in any London church provided

he would lay aside this or that practice or habit. I am very sorry for this. His work will go on, I suppose, nevertheless ; nay, he may hold public services, I suppose, if he pleases, at S. James' Hall, or elsewhere in London, under Lord Shaftesbury's Act, which strangely enough, seems to have paved the way for Brother Ignatius. But why turn him out of our churches ? I do not know that he has any thought of holding such services, but I have little doubt that, if he did, he would have overflowing congregations, whose regret would be, no doubt, that he was thus "cast out" of the Church.

My Lord, I do sincerely wish you would re-consider your resolution. It is only *toleration*, not favour that I would ask for Brother Ignatius. Would it not be more liberal, more practical, more nineteenth-century-like, to run down to Norwich, and stay a day or two at the monastery and judge for yourself of its working, than to inhibit Brother Ignatius unheard ? If you could sympathize with the Methodist preacher in Oxfordshire, I think you would sympathize also with the monks at Norwich ; —in all the elements of zeal and energy, of plain speaking and popularity, of unquestioned self-devotion and success, you would find scarce a pin's point of difference between the two ;—and the dress, in itself, is surely not worth caring for. It is quite possible that the monks might be a little demonstrative in their respect towards you ; but I do think you would allow that there is some real heart and life in the services of their chapel which does not quite deserve to be ridiculed or ignored. Brother Ignatius himself may be "a clerical error," perhaps ; *Punch* says he is, and in such a matter *Punch* is, of course, infallible ; but I can assure you, that what-

ever “error” there may be about Brother Ignatius, there is no mistake whatever as to the warmth, and heart, and life, and actual success (if that is to be taken into account) of the sermons and services held in his monastery chapel.

I remain, my Lord,
Your obedient servant,
EDWARD STUART.

P.S. I take this opportunity of thanking the congregation at the monastery for the offertory collection they so kindly made for the poor of S. Mary Magdalene's district while I was there. It was put into my hand (fifteen shillings) unexpectedly after the evening service, and has since been distributed, as they desired, as an expression of their good-will.

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